

**TESTIMONY TO THE  
SENATE BUDGET COMMITTEE**

Prepared February 20, 2002 by  
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**REGARDING THE IMPACT OF THE PRESIDENT'S 2003 BUDGET  
REQUEST ON HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present a few brief remarks on behalf of North Dakota Counties regarding this important issue.

The role that county government plays in the construction and maintenance of North Dakota's transportation infrastructure is immense. Counties maintain over 5,000 miles of paved highways; about 5,000 miles of major gravel collectors; and close to 17,000 miles of other graveled roads. Additionally, in the western half of the State, the counties with unorganized townships must also assume responsibility for township roads. Although a road mile comparison does not paint a complete picture, the first attached chart illustrates the enormous responsibility of county government.

The second chart displays similar information for bridges, which is a serious concern of counties, as they struggle to lower the number of deficient structures while farm equipment and truck weights continue to increase. As with the state system, efficient but safe transportation is the ultimate goal of county highway departments. Unfortunately, a recent federally-funded study of county roads and city streets estimated that the effective replacement schedule for county bridges is 122 years, two and a half times the recommended 50-year cycle. 37% of our major structures are already rated as deficient.

As with the State, counties also face escalating costs, decreasing population densities, and growing revenues that don't grow as fast as the costs. Each year, counties increase the miles of "minimum maintenance roads" and replace more bridges with low-water or "Texas" crossings. These steps help, but have not allowed counties to keep up.

The third chart illustrates the sources of revenue that have in the past supported county highway efforts. As you can see, federal dollars are an extremely important element in this critical mix of funding. The estimated 25% reduction in federal funding to North Dakota that the Executive Budget proposes, will seriously impact this entire funding structure.

The importance of this issue to county officials is demonstrated by their 100% participation in the federally funded “Urban Street and County Road Funding Needs Assessment” in 2000. This assessment revealed that, statewide, counties invest approximately \$83 million each year into our transportation infrastructure. Of this, federal transportation funding accounts for \$16.7 Million or 21% of the total.

Chart 4, taken from the Study indicates the consultant’s conclusions that to achieve what the consultant termed, a “reasonable” level of road funding – a level that would only slow the current deterioration of the rural road system – would take an overall investment of \$83 million more per year. The proposed budget takes North Dakota counties in the wrong direction, by at least four to five million dollars.

The final attachment is a page taken directly from this Assessment, and I believe it clearly illustrates the highway-funding dilemma. Collectively, federal, state, and county resources need to be increased not decreased, to avoid much larger costs if we delay the investment. Right now, we are on the wrong side of the curve.

The potential of even lower federal funding levels makes this picture only worse. While the State ultimately makes the decision on the appropriate share of federal funds to flow to local government, we must assume that smaller appropriations to North Dakota must result in smaller amounts for county highways. We are falling behind now, and if we are to provide basic transportation for agriculture, energy, and tourism, we must move in the other direction, or at a minimum hold on to the funding currently in-place.

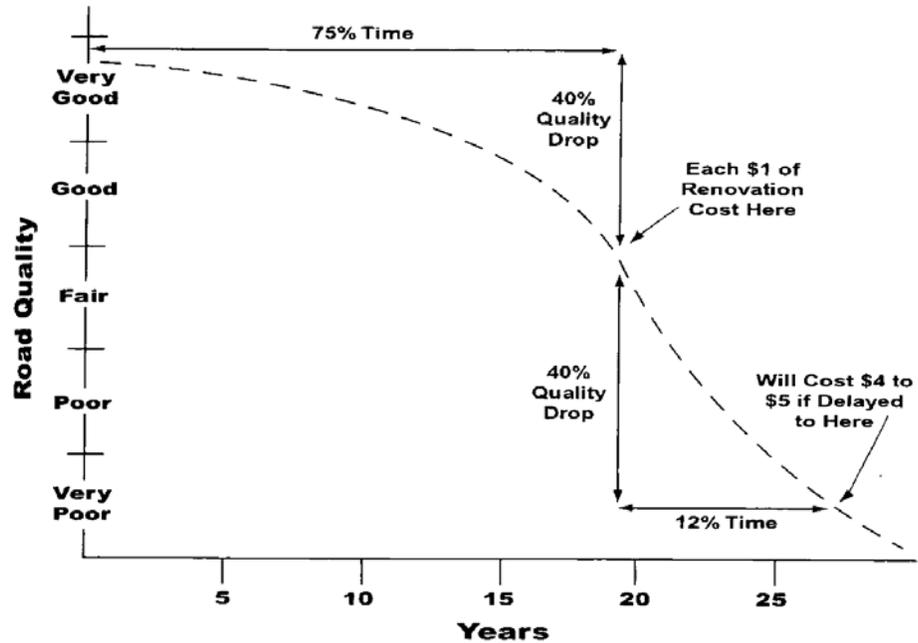
Obviously this is a very big, and very important issue for counties. We are pleased that this Committee has come to North Dakota and asked for county input. Our Association and the counties themselves stand ready to assist you in your continued examination in any way that we can.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak, and I welcome any questions you may have.





## Road Deterioration vs Time



SOURCE: American Public Works Association – 1991

The major types of improvement projects and their typical design life are:

- Asphalt Pavements: Design life of 20 years to total reconstruction. Optimum time frame for asphalt overlays is 8 to 15 years.
- Seal Coats: Typical design life of 5 to 10 years, 7 years average.
- Bridges: Design life of 50 years.
- Gravel Surfacing: 6 to 12 year life, depending on traffic and snow removal efforts.